



RENDLESHAM REMEMBERED

Kevin McClure

I'VE ALWAYS been rather embarrassed about the Rendlesham case. Way back in 1981 I'd not long since become an accredited UFOIN investigator (mostly on the strength of my 'Egryn Lights' research), and, insofar as investigation can be conducted over the telephone, I was the first person to start to put together the facts concerning the reports about Rendlesham. Because I made such a dog's breakfast of the task (particularly in losing my notes, and not even writing them up properly before I lost them), I've never bothered to read much about the case, knowing that the greater part of what I was reading seemed to have been spun together since the events, and did not represent the facts of what had happened as they were conveyed to me.

However, I never expected my role in the case, known only to a few others as far as I'm aware, to be played by one 'Bob Easton'. This, however, is what has happened in the strange new book by Georgina Bruni, *You Can't Tell The People - The Definitive Account of the Rendlesham Forest UFO Mystery*.

The title of the book comes, apparently, from a conversation Bruni had with Margaret Thatcher in 1997. Much is made of the position in society which facilitated Bruni's meeting with Thatcher who, other issues aside, may not have been at the peak of either her intellect or her sobriety by 1997. While aware of my tendency to discount the probity of statements made by self-pronounced supporters of the appalling Pinochet, I am concerned by the absence of provenance for this conversation. We aren't told exactly where or when it took place, or what witnesses were present. Why such a supposedly important comment was withheld until it became a book title, and a hook on which to hang publicity, is probably more easily explained: Bruni is an ardent apologist for Nick Pope, who writes the introduction to the book. She has afforded the fragility of Pope's claims to access to official secrets considerable help, and continues to do so.

The sequence of events was pretty much as Bruni sets it out in her chapter 'The Early Years'. Because, living in Leicester-shire, I was apparently the nearest UFOIN investigator to the case, Jenny Randles asked

me to call Paul Begg (a contact which I maintained because he was an interesting and perceptive chap and a very thorough researcher and which, incidentally, led to him making a rare personal appearance at an ASSAP event which I organised the following year). From Paul I gained some idea of what was said to have happened, and he gave me a number for 'David Potts'.

I rang this number and spoke to Paul's informant, who confirmed that he was a radar operator. I don't recall where he was located (not, I think, anywhere near Rendlesham), but he did tell me that the US Air Force had requested the recordings for the one night on which the mysterious events occurred: I don't think he had been aware of anything unusual appearing on screen, and he certainly didn't mention any account of vehicle interference.

Here, I get even vaguer. I spoke to somebody else between 'Potts' and, a day or two later, Dot Street and Brenda Butler, but I don't remember who. This person purported, I'm fairly confident, to have been present at the 'event', but only peripherally. He explained some confusion over the night on which it had taken place in terms of there being a 'false alarm' a day or two later, when staff again went out into the forest. There was no suggestion of there being events on three nights.

Of most interest, I guess, is the description I was given of what was seen. This amounts, I think, to something solid, light, reflective, possibly burning, even, appearing to be in a tree. It was clearly of unusual size and appearance to attract the attention it did, but there was no suggestion that it actually did anything at all except glow and, maybe, burn. I understood that its position was such that men were standing around the tree watching it. Certainly, I never took the 'lighthouse' theory for the cause of the original 'event' seriously, because it just didn't sound anything like what had been described to me. Though I really didn't take much interest in the information I was given, my conclusions at the time tended towards the cause being debris which had fallen into the tree and was in some way alight. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the specific nature of such debris

could account for the level of official interest.

Having been given a phone number by Jenny I phoned Street and Butler, and they called me on several occasions, usually early in the evening. I would then call Jenny and keep her updated. I only remember two points distinctly from those conversations. One, that whenever either of them saw a US serviceman in the street, they would approach him and ask him what he knew about the event. The other was their account of the chase through the forest, which had clearly been very exciting, but rather lacking in any deeper significance. I know that my calls mostly entailed listening.

I wrote to Lucius Farish regarding the serviceman who said he had returned to the US for mysterious reasons, and I recall that, not long after, Farish sent me the details of this person on a postcard, which I think I passed on to Jenny to investigate further.

We moved house shortly afterwards, and I never again found my notes of the various conversations I had. It had been an interesting few days, but at the time there seemed to be a viable, conventional, if unusual explanation for what was clearly a one-off event that happened to take place near a US base. I assumed that if it had happened somewhere else - at sea, or in another area where it went unwitnessed - nothing would have been lost by nobody having heard of it. As it was, nobody was much interested in the case at the time.

That was, of course, long before the commercial potential of Rendlesham had even begun to be recognised or - as it has turned out - mercilessly exploited. My own failure to maintain, and look after, proper records of the matter annoys me, and has taught me much about the need to investigate cases thoroughly, aggressively even, from the outset. And that if that wasn't done, then at the least to revisit cases that are highly implausible, and show every sign of being built on accrued speculation rather than facts. For what it's worth, I suspect that the huge majority of explanations for Rendlesham, whether sceptical or belief-based, result from incorrect conclusions as to fact, and are irrevocably tainted by individual beliefs and preconceptions. Consequently, I tend to reject almost all of what Bruni has written, but I can at least be quite sure that 'Bob Easton' did not do what she says he did, and that this is not the "definitive account" that it purports to be. If Bruni had wanted to establish the facts about the early investigation of Rendlesham, she should either have found me and asked what I knew - which I'd have been happy to tell her - or have

acknowledged that she didn't know who was involved at that stage. That she has, instead, attributed my actions to the mysterious 'Bob Easton' suggests that she preferred not to approach me, and created an unacknowledged fiction instead. Just what else about this book is not "definitive" remains to be seen.

LETTER

Peter Rogerson's comments on Moody's *Last Laugh* started a train of thought which I've travelled on briefly before but never stayed on till the terminus. It has always surprised me somewhat that American UFO conferences invariably incorporate a 'feast' (which generally falls somewhat short of what I understand by the term) and a 'show' which can include songs, music of a popular nature and comic sketches whose theatrical quality is on the level of family charades at Christmas. I was also reminded of that delightful anecdote in Vallee's journals, when he learns that Hynek, in Europe to meet fellow-students of the UFO phenomenon, cuts short a meeting with a group of them because he needs to get to the airport in time to purchase his duty-free entitlement. Another straw in the same wind is the need, felt by the authors of even the most serious American UFO books, to put in comic-strip or cartoon illustrations: you will recall that Lynn Catoe's 1969 bibliography, published by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research, no less, had nine pages of saucerian jokes.

It's interesting, too, to note the different tones of voice in the letters section of Jim Moseley's *Saucer Smear*. If it's Chris Allan, or Tim Good, or Jenny, then the subject is likely to be something at least halfway serious: whereas the majority of the American letters are not about UFOs but about personalities, calling names, slinging mud, using d*rt y w*rds.

Another indicator which has often given me food for wonder is the extraordinary nomenclature Hynek chose when, like Adam in Eden, he named the beasts - 'of the third kind': what sort of scientific classification is that? It is almost as though he knew it would one day be used to title a Hollywood movie... And, of course, their childlike jubilation when they are invited to appear as a guest of Oprah or one of those other shows which, for many Americans, take the place of religious devotion.

Peter's point about the inappropriateness of calling in the FBI to investigate *Witnessed* is well made. It is my practice, when I come up against a serious challenge to my incredulity, to make an annotated evaluation - I did this for *Missing Time*, for instance, and later for Corso's amazing fan-

tasy. But when it came to *Witnessed*, I was positively embarrassed to list the absurdities: how could a person whom I know to be intelligent and rational put out a scenario so barmy that no science fiction author would consider it for a moment?

And yet these same people are ready to take one another's books seriously. Even books as bonkers as Jacobs's *The Threat*, Strieber's *Communion* or Mack's *Abducted* are given a solemn hearing, with never a hint that their basic premises may be so fundamentally flawed that belief is out of the question. When one opens Sturrock's *The UFO Enigma* to find the wretched Trans-en-Provence 'case' given 40 pages of sage consideration as one of the most significant UFO events ever, one wonders if these people lack all sense of proportion?

If there was a positive side to this game-playing, we might find it easier to forgive. If there was even one major American UFO author who could stand back and see the UFO phenomenon steadily and see it whole, for the extraordinary mixture of sense and nonsense that it is! Keel came closest, but one has the impression that most American ufologists are embarrassed at having let his *Trojan Horse* through their gates. Bullard, bless him, generally gets matters into something approaching a balanced perspective, even if we shake our heads at his ability not to draw the conclusions that seem to impose themselves.

But how one longs for someone over there to stand up and say, openly and outright, that if *Left at East Gate* is to be taken seriously, then its author should be rushed into psychiatric treatment: that nobody could have written *The Day after Roswell* unless he was suffering from megalomania, or *Communion* unless he was in line for testing for paranoia. Are these people writing fun books, for entertainment only? Or seriously, to work something out of their system? Or simply to make a quick buck? Sometimes I find myself hoping that it's the last of these alternatives.

Hilary Evans, London

EDITORIAL

A question often asked in discussions on UFOs is: If the US Air Force (or any other agency of any government) had in its possession crashed saucers and the bodies of their ET pilots, how could they keep this secret for many years? This question is invariably answered by giving examples of

military projects, spying activities, etc., successfully kept under wraps for long periods. What the ET believers always fail to realise - or choose to ignore - is the fact that government agencies can keep secrets only concerning matters which they control. If some UFOs are ET visitors then earthly governments have no control over them, as they can appear anywhere at any time, and convincing evidence of their physical reality could fall into the hands of any organisation or individual, anywhere on Earth. They could no more be kept secret than could volcanic eruptions or meteor showers.

So this is the question that we intend to keep asking until we get a sensible answer: How does a government agency hush up something which it can neither predict nor control?

HOAX!

Magonia is planning to publish articles on UFO hoaxes in future issues. The Editor would like to hear from anyone who has anything interesting and informative to say about them. Please send all communications on this topic to: John Rimmer, John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, LONDON SW14 8HB UK

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